



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge

Refuge Highlights

February 2020: *The Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge is presently located in twenty-two different locations in the four primary Connecticut River watershed states of Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont. The Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge is located in ten locations on the mainland and near shore island along the northern shore of the Long Island Sound in Connecticut.*

Friends Make It Happen at Pondicherry



Photo Credit: Friends of Pondicherry/ David Govatski

The Pondicherry Division of the Conte Refuge experiences considerable levels of visitation throughout the year. With more than 15 miles of public use trails, refuge staff and volunteers work year round to maintain the trail system. This month, one thousand pounds of hemlock timbers were transported with a snowmobile across the refuge to designated staging areas. In the summer of 2020, the Northern Conte Youth Conservation Corps trail crew will use the timbers to upgrade existing bog bridging on the refuge. Thank you to the Friends of Pondicherry for their support.

For more information contact: Steve_Agius@fws.gov

Girl Scouts Help Prepare for Spring Bird Migration



Photo Credit: USFWS

This month, Hadley Girl Scout Troops 64645 and 11914 worked on their Outdoor Journey Badge by helping refuge staff build bird houses, bat boxes, and barn swallow nesting structures. As an introduction to the activity, the girls learned about aerial insectivores and the important role the refuge plays in providing habitat. The girls then teamed up to build the boxes and nest structures, which will be placed not only at the refuge, but at various locations throughout their local community. As a follow up to the event, the troop will visit the nest structures this spring and summer to observe the birds and their nests.

For more information contact: Jennifer_Lapis@fws.gov

McKinney Refuge Begins Planning for Work at its Great Meadows Unit



Photo Credit: USFWS

Contractors were on site this month with refuge staff to begin planning for a major rehabilitation of the refuge's Great Meadows Unit in Stratford, Connecticut. The project will use one million dollars in settlement money to restore large swaths of marsh for wetland wildlife and to make improvements to visitor viewing areas.

For more information contact: Shaun_Roche@fws.gov



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Building Swallow Nesting Structures is a Team Effort



Photo Credit: USFWS

Conte Refuge is taking its aerial insectivore initiative on the road. As we prepare for the 2020 nesting season, Refuge staff worked with students at Dean Technical/ Hoyloke High School to build barn swallow nesting structures. Students learned about aerial insectivores, the important role the refuge plays in providing habitat, and then helped build nest box structures that will be placed in locations throughout the Pioneer Valley. Once nesting season is in full swing, students will visit some of the locations to observe the birds and learn more about barn swallow nesting behavior.

For more information contact: Jennifer_Lapis@fws.gov

New Barn Doors Installed For Aerial Insectivores



Photo Credit: USFWS

At the Fort River Division we added barn doors to the east side of the boat house, allowing us to close the two foot by eight foot opening outside of nesting season. The boat house will serve as an aerial insectivore nesting demonstration exhibit. Nest site activity will be available for viewing via a closed circuit camera system. A kiosk with a monitor will be built near the Fort River Birding and Nature Trail head this spring.

For more information contact: Andrew_French@fws.gov

More Improvements to Fort River Division



Photo Credit: USFWS

This month we excavated 600 linear feet of perimeter around the arena at the Fort River Division, in preparation for replacing the pressure treated lumber around the building. In addition to this project, we are replacing the first 24 inches of siding with pressure treated plywood. Once complete, the building will be ready for metal siding.

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Newly Created Small Pond at Fort River Division



Photo Credit: USFWS

We created a small pond next to the northeast corner of the boat house. The barn swallow pond will benefit amphibians and other aquatic wildlife. This pond, as well as other wetlands at the refuge provide a source of mud to build nests, foraging areas for aerial insectivores in cold weather, and as a potential source of water in a fire emergency.

For more information contact: Andrew_French@fws.gov

Sun Shines Bright for Winter Tree Walk at McKinney



Photo Credit: USFWS

On a sunny February day, ten visitors accompanied Stewart B. McKinney Biologist Kris Vagos on a winter tree identification walk at Salt Meadow. The 90 minute tour introduced visitors to useful tree identification tips such as, changing bark patterns on red maples, pointy buds of beech trees, soggy soil favored by black tupelos and seed pods on the top of poplars. Attendees were extremely pleased with the educational walk.

For more information contact: Kristina_Vagos@fws.gov

Setting The Stage for Barn Swallow Nesting Season



Photo Credit: USFWS

Refuge staff modified twelve (8ft x 8ft) barn swallow nesting structures to accommodate ten individual nest sites per structure. We also added two seed nests, four wooden shelves and four electrical boxes to each one. As part of the experimental process, we heated half of the seed nests to 225 degrees to kill any potential residual parasites. This may give us an indication of nest site preference. In total, the building will have nesting contact points for 156 nests.

For more information contact: Andrew_French@ws.gov



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Regional Equipment Training at Fort River Division



Photo Credit: USFWS

Conte's Fort River Division was the site for Regional equipment training this month. This piece of equipment attaches to the skid steer, and uses GIS technology to help resurface gravel roads and parking lots with more accuracy and precision. In addition to the training, we received enough gravel to resurface our access road, visitor parking lot and roads around refuge buildings.

For more information contact: Darren_Stover@fws.gov

Fort River Archery Range in Sight For Spring 2020



Photo Credit: USFWS

Conte staff accomplished a considerable amount of work on the planned archery range that is being built at the Fort River Division. Half of the safety fence is now complete. The fence will serve as a secondary safety measure at the range. We will also install backstops behind each target. The archery range will be primarily an instructional range and will be available to partnering organizations as well.

For more information contact: Andrew_French@fws.gov

A Work Day Surprise



Photo Credit: USFWS

Some of Conte Staff had an exciting experience with Massachusetts Fish and Wildlife this month while working in the Hadley area this month. The photo speaks for itself, as these opportunities do not come around often.

For more information contact: Andrew_French@fws.gov



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Senator Sanders' Outreach Staffer Visits the Nulhegan Basin Division



Photo Credit: USFWS

Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge staff had the pleasure of giving a tour of the Nulhegan Basin Division to Senator Bernie Sanders' outreach staff member, Greta Hasler. Ms. Hasler is new to her position, and we wanted to introduce her to Vermont's natural treasures at Nulhegan. With more than 25 miles of groomed snowmobile trails on the Nulhegan Basin Division, the tour of the refuge was provided by snowmobile.

For more information contact: Steve_Agius@fws.gov

Meeting with Vermont Governor Scott



Photo Credit: USFWS

Vermont Governor Scott and his cabinet members toured Essex County as part of the Capital for a Day Initiative. Administration staff visited the Nulhegan Basin Division office and spoke with the staff about the National Wildlife Refuge System and recreational opportunities on refuges. Refuge staff later attended a recreation meeting with Secretary Moore, from Vermont's Agency of Natural Resources and Deputy Commissioner Lincoln from Vermont's Forest, Parks and Recreation. Refuge staff also attended a meeting with Governor Scott to discuss opportunities in Northern Vermont.

For more information contact: Steve_Agius@fws.gov

University of Vermont USGS Cooperative Research Unit Meeting



Staff from the Vermont National Wildlife Refuges and the Lake Champlain Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office attended the annual USGS Cooperative Research planning meeting at the University of Vermont. At the meeting, updates were provided about ongoing research projects throughout the state of Vermont. Three USGS Coop graduate students are completing their research on moose within and around the Nulhegan Basin Division of the Cote Refuge.

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Vermont Fish and Wildlife Meeting



Conte Refuge staff participated in the annual Vermont Fish and Wildlife Division meeting in Barre, Vermont. The annual meeting is an opportunity for refuge staff to meet with their state counterparts to discuss ongoing and upcoming habitat and wildlife conservation projects, which this year include the winter deer yard survey and woodcock GPS research project.

For more information contact: Steve_Agius@fws.gov

Nulhegan Basin Winter Deer Yard Survey



February marks the second consecutive month that staff from the Conte Refuge, Vermont Fish and Wildlife and more than 60 conservation partners worked together to survey over 100 one kilometer survey grids for winter deer habitat. The large collaborative survey effort is taking place in Northeast Vermont and includes the Nulhegan Basin Division. With snow depths exceeding 48 inches in some locations and temperatures dipping below minus 30 degrees Fahrenheit, the continued support of the local community to complete the surveys exemplifies the importance of wildlife conservation in Vermont.

Photo Credit: USFWS

For more information contact: Steve_Agius@fws.gov

A Busy School Break at The Science Museum



Conte Visitor Service staff spend part of the Massachusetts school vacation week at the Springfield Science Museum, talking with visitors about the river table and the Connecticut River Watershed. An added bonus of the large amount of visitors, was being able to introduce our new Visitor Service Intern to this highly valuable interpretive tool. Hundreds of museum visitors experienced the demonstration of the river table and learned a little more about the watershed and the role that Conte Refuge plays in conservation efforts.

Photo Credit: USFWS

For more information contact: Jennifer_Lapis@fws.gov